

□ Reading time: 6 min.

*Sister Maria Troncatti, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, declared a saint on 19 October 2025, lived her life reaching out to the Lord with supplication and abandonment, and extending them to her neighbour as a sign of help, consolation, and healing. She was a missionary of the Gospel; she proclaimed the Kingdom of God. She healed the sick; she travelled from village to village and performed healings of body and soul. Sister Maria's hands were hands that welcomed, helped, cared for, and blessed.*

### **Hands that care for and heal**

Indeed, what a celebration and at the same time, what a great fright was the first encounter with the Shuar Indians on the way to Macas, deep in the Amazon rainforest of Ecuador, a hundred years ago, after a journey of over a month amidst a thousand dangers and difficulties. The welcome was conditional on a safe-conduct pass, without which no postponement or forced repatriation was foreseen, but only a summary execution. An adolescent daughter of the cacique, the tribal chief, had been accidentally hit by a rifle bullet a few days earlier due to a rivalry between opposing families. The wound was now festering. The shaman consulted had refused to proceed and the case was serious. Knowing that there was a "doctora" among the missionaries, without too many preambles the alternative was posed: "If you cure her, we will welcome you; if she dies, we will kill you." A significant gesture indicated that the same fate awaited the others in the group. Meanwhile, some warriors, like "avenging statues", guarded the small mission. Everyone looked at Sister Maria with pleading eyes. The chief opened the door, the girl was brought in and laid on a table. "Sister Maria, operate on her," said Monsignor Domenico Comin, the apostolic vicar. "I am not a doctor, Monsignor; and with what, with what instruments?" "We will all pray while you operate," insisted the Provincial Mother Mioletti. The girl also looked at her. Sister Maria placed a hand on her forehead; it was burning. The missionary asked for water to be boiled, covered herself with a white sheet, and with the help of iodine tincture and a pocket knife carefully sterilised over a flame, proceeded with a decisive cut, mentally invoking the Help of Christians, while the missionaries prayed in the chapel. As if pushed by an unknown hand, the bullet sprang out and fell to the ground, amidst the uncontrolled laughter of the Kivari who expressed their satisfaction. "Our Lady helped me," wrote Sister Maria. "I saw a miracle; I was able to extract the bullet and the child was healed, thanks to Mary Help of Christians and Mother Mazzarello." Thus, attributing the beginning of her work to the maternal intercession of the Help of Christians, the

vast field of her mission opened up to her, curing a child as a first fruit and a sign of all the attention that Sister Maria and her Salesian Sisters would place on defending and promoting the life and growth of girls in a particular way. A child wounded because of tribal and vengeful hatred against which Sister Maria, with all the missionaries, would fight the good fight of the Gospel, proclaiming the redemptive power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

### **Praying hands**

She accompanied the spiritual direction of souls with the rosary in hand, offering the mysteries of Christ's suffering, His joys and His triumphs for those who approached her. Her solicitude knew how to grasp, along with the medical problem, the vital and family context, because "she could not see anyone suffer. She made every effort to find a solution to every difficulty and leave everyone in peace." The ultimate goal was very clear, to bring or bring everyone closer to God. "With the rosary in hand, she solved difficult cases, both material such as the care of the sick and difficult economic situations, as well as spiritual ones, such as the reunification of divided families, the return to friendship with God of those who had been far from Him for years." Her medicine cabinet thus became an outpatient clinic for souls.

"When she cared for the sick, Sister Maria was keenly interested in their religious-moral life and the problems of each one and of their family. She knew how to guide and encourage; she knew how to lead and correct with clarity." Her love for the sick was truly heroic. She left everything and, at any hour of the day or night, in good or bad weather, she went where she was called with a stick in one hand and a rosary in the other, and she had no peace until she had managed to improve the patient's health or help them to die well.

### **Miraculous hands**

A man terribly burned and maddened by pain was thus cared for by Sister Maria. For two days and two nights, she began the treatment with the rosary and medicated him for a few weeks. After thirty days, this man with his wife, went to fulfil the vow made to the Purest Virgin of Macas. He was completely healthy, without any sign or scar on his skin. No one would have believed that he could survive that ordeal. God healed him through the miraculous hands, daily prayers, and maternal heart of Sister Maria. Her zeal is well captured by this judgment, "heroic in the practice of charity. She did not look at sacrifices or dangers or contagions; even less did she stop before atmospheric phenomena that could be adverse... It was enough to know that someone was suffering for her to fly to their aid, carrying in her heart the hope of being able to do good, even to their souls."

She undertook with other Sisters an immense evangelising and human promotion activity amidst numerous risks, not excluding those caused by ferocious animals in the forest. The localities of Macas, Sevilla Don Bosco, and Sucúa are still some of the flourishing “miracles” of her activity as a nurse, surgeon and orthopaedist, dentist and anaesthetist. But above all, she was a catechist and witness of the Lord, proclaimer of the Good News.

### **Hands that extinguish the fire of hatred and revenge**

Around the age of seven or eight, Maria was in the summer at Col d'Aprica (Sondrio) with other shepherds who, having gathered their flocks, played by the stream. The children, to dry themselves after a downpour, decided to light a small fire, but a sudden gust of wind pushed the flame towards Maria and a flash licked her dress and stockings. Frightened, she tried to extinguish the flames with her hands; while her stockings seemed to fry on her legs, her hands, burned, blackened and remained as if sealed. Providentially, a man passing by on the nearby mule track ran, put out the fire and, while trying to medicate her with oil, exclaimed, “Poor child, she will never be able to use her hands again!” A few hours later, however, her hands and arms returned to be healthy and beautiful, without any trace of burns, while the scars on her legs would remain for life. There would be another fire that would lick Maria Troncatti's life, that of hatred and revenge, which she would often see flare up in her missionary adventure among the Shuar and among the colonists. A fire that she would try to extinguish with the oil of goodness and, at the end of her life, with that of her own life offered in sacrifice. And those hands that the fire seemed to prevent her from using would be instruments for the fire of charity that would bring relief, care, and comfort to so many people.

### **Hands that abandon themselves to God**

To the Sisters who expressed their anguish and fear about the situation created in Sucúa, Ecuador, after the fire that destroyed the Salesian mission in July 1969, she replied with decision and firmness, “Little daughters, do not fear and do not be afraid for all that has happened. Let us abandon ourselves into the hands of God and pray for the conversion of the wicked! Let them rest in peace! Let them trust in the Virgin Help of Christians and they will see that this anguish will not last long; tranquillity and calm will arrive very soon! I assure you!” These are words of farewell, in the peace of a life entirely given. Soon after her tragic death on 25 August 1969, her reputation for holiness became vox populi. So, people kept repeating, “she died like a saint.” And everyone wanted to touch those industrious and prodigious hands once again. The local people felt orphaned, but were

convinced that they had in Sister Maria "a protector in heaven because she was a saint."

This trusting and unwavering hope made her always live abandoned in the hands of God and also pushed her to instil in those she assisted with her maternal charity the thought of the future happiness promised by the Father to those who seek Him with love and trust in this life. It was a hope that was visibly manifested even and only in her naive filial trust in divine assistance. In fact, the unwavering aspiration for Heaven not only sustained her in the inevitable and numerous difficulties encountered in fulfilling her mission and, despite everything, made her unconditionally trust in divine help to solve many practical problems and to keep the charitable activities of the mission alive. But also, and above all, it instilled in her heart that peace and tranquillity that she also communicated to others. "As was her faith, so was her hope! It can be said of her that she hoped against all hope. Nothing frightened her, nothing disturbed her. Her hope was boundless. For Sister Maria, everything was a reason to hope in God and the reward He gives to those who live dedicated to His cause. Nor did she fear sudden death. Rather she asked God for it and considered it a reward, because for her God was a Father of immense goodness and mercy, and in Him she trusted totally."